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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 2240
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0120
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 2977
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 9858
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0333
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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 4346
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 9249
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 3431
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 5366
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 6955
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 001569

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOXO
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[11. Mideast](#)

[12. Syria](#)

[13. US and Iran](#)

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that former prime minister Ehud Barak won Monday's first round of the Labor Party primaries. Barak finished with 35.6 percent of the votes to Ayalon's 30.6 percent. Current Labor Party leader Amir Peretz trailed with 22.4 percent, while Knesset Member Ophir Pines-Paz received 8 percent. A second round of voting will take place in two weeks. Media analysts estimated that Peretz would join Ami Ayalon in the second round and help him to victory.

The media summed up two weeks of Qassam rocket firing. Maariv reported that 256 (according to Yediot 280) rockets were fired at Israel, with two people killed and 164 injured. Yediot reported that 40 percent of Sderot residents had left the city.

Yediot reported that Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyah has taken Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's threats seriously and gone underground. According to the paper he is running his activities from a hiding place.

Ha'aretz reported that PM Ehud Olmert's senior aide Yoram Turbowicz will leave for Washington in a few days for talks with senior officials in the US administration. The paper also noted that Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni will meet Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Thursday at a convention in Vienna.

Leading media reported that Israel Defense Forces troops shot and killed two Hamas militants on Tuesday in a gun battle that broke out during a cross-border raid into Gaza. The IDF also arrested 12 wanted Palestinian militants in the Balata refugee camp in the West Bank town of Nablus early Tuesday, including Palestinian parliament member Jamal Tirawi, a member of Palestinian Authority Chairman

Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction.

Ha'aretz reported that the police have prevented Muslim burial at the foot of the Temple Mount for several months, as Public Security Minister Avi Dichter responded to pleas to reserve the area as a significant archeological site.

Leading media reported on an historic meeting between US and Iranian ambassadors in Iraq. The media noted that the two ambassadors issued a press release after the meeting stating that the meeting focused on Iraq only.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If Olmert manages to keep Labor in the coalition, with a new defense minister, he will have a few quiet months, as the final Winograd report does not endanger him at the moment."

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "What we need are leaders endowed with both brains and brawn -- courageous leaders prepared to talk to Syria, Saudi Arabia and all the Sunni Islamic countries in order to reach a comprehensive agreement. Only that will put an end to Hamas."

Block Quotes:

11. "Olmert's Survival"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (05/29): "The primaries in Labor are the start of a new season of 'Survivor,' starring Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The working assumption in the Prime Minister's Bureau is that Labor will stay in the coalition, regardless of who is elected to lead the party. In such a scenario, the coming weeks will be dedicated to political maneuvering, at the end of which a new minister will take

over at the Defense Ministry, and the government will continue to function as usual.... The national agenda also demands unity, and

not new elections: the Gaza Strip is boiling over, and there are threats of war in the North, accompanied by hints of peace. Sources close to Olmert say the 'evaluation' of the Syrian channel is 'very serious and very secret.'.... If Olmert manages to keep Labor in the coalition, with a new defense minister, he will have a few quiet months, as the final Winograd report does not endanger him at the moment."

12. "Brains and Brawn"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (05/29): "No country in the world would sit around and watch one of its cities being bombarded for six years, powerless to bring the violence to an end.... Ariel Sharon's unilateral disengagement turned out to be a serious mistake. It gave terror a boost, allowed the Iranians to call the shots in Gaza instead of the Egyptians, fueled anarchy in the Palestinian street and pushed the chances for an agreement even further away.... Every time we evacuate Sderot rather than Beit Hanun, we have lost the battle.... So what are we going to do with Gaza? Occupy it? We have already done that. What have we achieved by that, apart from occupation? Haven't we learned that occupation is like riding on a tiger's back? All the fleas go along for the ride. There are no overnight solutions. What we need are leaders endowed with both brains and brawn -- courageous leaders prepared to talk to Syria, Saudi Arabia and all the Sunni Islamic countries in order to reach a comprehensive agreement. Only that will put an end to Hamas."

12. Syria:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It is not clear why Assad's supposed peace overtures are taken seriously when he continues to be a main sponsor of terrorism against Israel, and the idea of him making a Sadat-like trip to Jerusalem is risible. It also makes little sense, however, for Israel to be seen as the party that is refusing to negotiate with a belligerent Arab state. Assad is bluffing, and bluffs should be called."

Block Quotes:

"Call Assad's bluff"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (05/29): "It is striking that even the most oppressive dictatorships feel a need to pretend to reflect the popular will. Such single candidate elections show that even dictators feel the need to genuflect toward the fundamental premise of democracy: that the people hold the right to choose their leader.... Syria's Assad is no exception.... The idea that this regime is interested in making peace with Israel strains credulity. It is not clear why Assad's supposed peace overtures are taken seriously when he continues to be a main sponsor of terrorism against Israel, and the idea of him making a Sadat-like trip to Jerusalem is risible. It also makes little sense, however, for Israel to be seen as the party that is refusing to negotiate with a belligerent Arab state. Assad is bluffing, and bluffs should be called. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert should say that he is willing to meet with Assad anywhere, including Jerusalem or Damascus. At the same time, Olmert should say that he does not believe that Syria is serious about peace, and therefore it is important for international sanctions to be tightened against the regime to force it to end its rampant support for aggression and terrorism. Our bet is that Assad will not meet with Olmert, though he may try to launch lower level talks.... If Assad does surprise, and does meet Olmert, this would be a victory for Israel. This is not because Israel needs to be legitimized by such a regime, but because it would be a significant 'concession' by the most stalwart member of the rejectionist Arab camp. But Assad won't surprise. The irony is Olmert, even with an approval rating of 3 percent, is more legitimate than '99 percent' Assad. This dictator, as strong as he may wish to seem, is too weak to make peace."

13. US and Iran:

Summary:

Middle East affairs correspondent Zvi Barel wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If the U.S. is willing to negotiate with Iran on a cardinal issue like Iraq, there is no reason why the nuclear question will not move from the corridors of the United Nations to a track of direct negotiations between the two countries, which is what Tehran wants."

Block Quotes:

"Axis of Evil meets the Great Satan"

Middle East affairs correspondent Zvi Barel wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (05/29): "The meeting of the Iranian and the American ambassadors in Baghdad merits the adjective 'historic' after 27 years during which there were no open negotiations between the two countries -- neither direct nor mission specific.... On a practical level, the two sides presented their overall interests in Iraq and only in that country, and according to reports from Baghdad, the two sides are in agreement on some issues.... The talks yesterday have identified Iran as a strategic partner for the U.S. and Iraq, and therefore, as a country that can also pose demands on other matters, with the expectation that they be met. After all, if the U.S. is willing to negotiate with Iran on a cardinal issue like Iraq, there is no reason why the nuclear question will not move from the corridors of the United Nations to a track of direct negotiations between the two countries, which is what Tehran wants. Washington will find it difficult to explain the difference between its willingness to hold open and direct negotiations over Iraq and continue to press for sanctions on Iran on the nuclear issue. Clearly, if the two sides agree to continue their public meetings, and upgrade the level of their officials in the talks, not only will the nuclear question be on the agenda for discussion, but also civilian cooperation between the Great Satan and the Axis of Evil -- a vision that has been promoted for years by the American petroleum giants and other private investors.... There is also a hard lesson for Israel in this meeting: The country that supports Hezbollah and Hamas, rejects the Arab peace initiatives and whose president threatens to wipe Israel off the map is benefiting from a strategic standing with Israel's strategic partner - America."

JONES